

LIMA BEANS

A Scherzo Play in One Act

By ALFRED KREYMBORG

SAMUEL FRENCH

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Author of *Manikin* and *Minikin*, Puppet Plays, Plays for *Merry Andrews*, *Rocking Chairs* & Other Comedies, *There's a Moon Tonight*, etc.

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Lima Beans

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LIMA BEANS

The characters are four: HUSBAND, WIFE, the voice of a HUCKSTER and—the CURTAIN! HUSBAND and WIFE might be two marionettes. The scene is a miniature dining-room large enough to contain a small table, two chairs, a tiny sideboard, an open window, a closed door leading to the other rooms, and additional elbow space. Pantomime is modestly indulged by HUSBAND and WIFE, suggesting an inoffensive parody, unless the author errs, of the contours of certain ancient Burmese dances. The impedimenta of occasional rhymes are unpremeditated. If there must be a prelude of music, let it be nothing more consequential than one of the innocuous parlor rondos of Carl Maria Von Weber. As a background color scheme, black and white might not prove amiss.

As the curtain, which is painted in festoons of vegetables, rises gravely, THE WIFE is disclosed setting the table for dinner. Aided by the sideboard, she has attended to her place, as witness the neat arrangement of plate, cup and saucer, and knife, fork and spoons at one side. Now, more consciously, she begins the performance of the important duty opposite. This question of concrete paraphernalia, and the action consequent thereupon, might of course be left entirely to the imagination of the beholder.

THE WIFE (*wistfully whimsical*)

Put a knife here,
place a fork there—
marriage is greater than love.
Give him a large spoon,
give him a small—
you're sure of your man when you dine him.
A cup for his coffee,
a saucer for spillings,
a plate rimmed with roses
to hold his night's fillings—
roses for hearts, ah,
but food for the appetite!
Mammals are happiest home after dark!

[*The rite over, she stands off in critical admiration, her arms akimbo, her head bobbing from side to side. Then, seriously, as she eyes THE HUSBAND'S dinner plate.*

But what shall I give him to eat to-night?
It mustn't be limas,
we've always had limas—
one more lima would shatter his love!

[*An answer comes through the open window from the dulcet insinuatingly persuasive horn of THE HUCKSTER.*

THE WIFE

Oh, ah, ooh!

THE HUCKSTER (*singing mysteriously*)

I got tomatoes,
I got potatoes,

I got new cabbages,
I got cauliflower,
I got red beets,
I got onions,
I got lima beans—

THE WIFE (*who has stolen to the window fascinated*)
Any fruit?

THE HUCKSTER

I got oranges,
I got pineapples,
blackberries,
currants,
blueberries,
I got bananas,
I got—

THE WIFE

Bring me some string beans!

THE HUCKSTER

Yes, mam!

[*His head bobs in at the window.*

[THE WIFE takes some coins from the sideboard. A paper bag is flung into the room. THE WIFE catches it and airily tosses the coins into the street. Presently, she takes a bowl from the sideboard, sits down, peeps into the bag, dramatically tears it open, and relapses into a gentle rocking as she strings the beans to this invocation.

String the crooked ones,
string the straight—
love needs a change every meal.
To-morrow, come kidney beans,

Wednesday, come white or black—
limas, return not too soon!
The string bean rules in the
vegetable kingdom,
gives far more calories, sooner digests—
love through with dinner is quicker to play!
Straight ones, crooked ones,
string beans are blessed!

[Enter THE HUSBAND briskly. In consternation, THE WIFE tries to hide the bowl, but sets it on the table and hurries to greet him. He spreads his hands and bows.

SHE

Good evening, sweet husband!

HE

Good evening, sweet wife!

SHE

You're back, I'm so happy—

HE

So am I—'twas a day—

SHE

'Twas a day?

HE

For a hot sweating donkey—

SHE

A donkey?

HE

A mule!

SHE

My poor, dear, poor spouse—

HE

No, no, my good mouse—

SHE

Rest your tired, weary arms—

HE

They're not tired, I'm not weary—
I'd perspire tears and blood drops
just to keep my mouse in cheese.
In a town or in the fields,
on the sea or in a balloon,
with a pickaxe or a fiddle,
with one's back a crooked wish-bone,
occupation, labor, work—
work's a man's best contribution.

SHE

Contribution?

HE

Yes, to Hymen!

SHE

Ah yes—

HE

But you haven't—

SHE

I haven't?

HE

You haven't—

SHE

I haven't?

HE

You have *not*—

SHE

Ah yes, yes indeed!

[THE WIFE *embraces* THE HUSBAND and *kisses him daintily six times*.

HE

Stop, queer little dear!

Why is a kiss?

SHE

I don't know.

HE

You don't?

SHE

No!

HE

Then why do you do it?

SHE

Love!

HE

Love?

SHE

Yes!

HE

And why is love?

SHE

I don't know.

HE

You don't?

SHE

No!

HE

And why don't you know?

SHE

Because!

HE

Because?

SHE

Yes!

HE

Come, queer little dear!

[THE HUSBAND *embraces* THE WIFE and *kisses her daintily six times.*

HE (*solemnly*)

And now!

SHE (*nervously*)

And now?

HE

And now!

SHE

And now?

HE

And now I am hungry.

SHE

And now you are hungry?

HE

Of course I am hungry.

SHE

To be sure you are hungry, but—

HE

But?

SHE

But!

HE

But?

[THE WIFE tries to edge between THE HUSBAND and the table. He gently elbows her aside. She comes back; he elbows her less gently. This pantomime is repeated several times; his elbowing is almost rough

at the last. THE HUSBAND reaches the table and ogles the bowl. His head twists from the bowl to THE WIFE, back and forth. An ominous silence.

HE

String beans?

SHE

String beans!

HE

String beans?

SHE

String beans!

[*A still more ominous silence. THE HUSBAND'S head begins fairly to bob, only to stop abruptly as he breaks forth:*

HE

I perspire tears and blood drops
in a town or in the fields,
on the sea or in a balloon,
with my pickaxe or my fiddle,
just to come home
footsore, starving, doubled with appetite
to a meal of—string beans?

Where are my limas?

SHE

We had—

HE

We had?

SHE

Lima beans yesterday—we had them—

HE

We had them?

SHE

Day before yesterday—

HE

What of it?

SHE

Last Friday, last Thursday—

HE

I know it—

SHE

Last Wednesday, last Tuesday—

HE

What then, mam?

SHE

We had them

all the way since we were married—

HE

Two weeks ago this very day—

SHE

I thought you'd have to have a change—

HE

A change?

SHE

I thought you'd like to have a change—

HE

A change?

You thought?

I'd like?

A change?

What!

From the godliest of vegetables,

my kingly bean,

that soft, soothing,

succulent, caressing,

creamy, persuasively serene,
my buttery entity?
You would dethrone it?
You would play renegade?
You'd raise a usurper
in the person of this
elongated, cadaverous,
throat-scratching, greenish
caterpillar—
you'd honor a parochial,
menial pleb,
an accursed legume,
sans even the petty grandeur
of cauliflower,
radish, pea,
onion, asparagus,
potato, tomato—
to the rank of household god?
Is this your marriage?
Is this your creed of love?
Is this your contribution?
Dear, dear,
was there some witch at the altar
who linked your hand with mine in troth
only to have it broken in a bowl?
Ah, dear, dear—

SHE

Dear, dear!

HE

You have listened to a temptress—

SHE

I have listened to my love of you—

HE

You, the pure, the angelic—

SHE

Husband, dear—

HE

Silence!

SHE

Husband!

HE

Silence!

[THE WIFE *collapses into her chair.* THE HUSBAND
seizes the bowl to this malediction:

Worms,
snakes,
reptiles,
caterpillars,
I do not know from whence ye came,
but I know whither ye shall go.

My love,
my troth,
my faith
shall deal with ye.

Avaunt,
vanish,
begone
from this domicile,
dedicated,
consecrated,
immortalized
in the name of Hymen!

Begone!

[THE HUSBAND throws the bowl and beans out of the window. The customary crash of broken glass, off-stage, is heard. A smothered sob escapes THE WIFE. THE HUSBAND strides towards the door. THE WIFE raises her head.

SHE

Husband!

HE

Traitor!

SHE

Love, sweet husband!

HE

Traitor, traitor!

[THE HUSBAND glares at THE WIFE, and slams the door behind him. THE WIFE collapses again. Her body rocks to and fro. Silence. Then, still more mysteriously than the first time, the horn and the voice of THE HUCKSTER. THE WIFE stops rocking, raises her head and gets up. A woebegone expression vanishes before one of eagerness, of housewifely shrewdness, of joy. She steals to the window.

THE HUCKSTER

I got oranges,
I got pineapples,
I got blackberries,
I got currants,
I got blueberries,
I got bananas,
I got—

THE WIFE

Any vegetables?

THE HUCKSTER

I got tomatoes,
I got potatoes,
new cabbages,
cauliflower,
red beets,
I got *string* beans,
I got—

THE WIFE

Bring me some lima beans!

THE HUCKSTER

I got onions,
I got—

THE WIFE

Bring me some lima beans!

THE HUCKSTER

Yes, mam!

[*His head appears again.*

[*The performance of paper bag and coins is repeated. Excitedly, THE WIFE takes another bowl from the sideboard. She sits down, tears open the bag, clicks her heels, and hastily, recklessly, begins splitting the limas. One or two pop out and bound along the floor. THE WIFE stops. Pensively:*

There you go,
hopping away,
just like bad sparrows—
no, no, more like him.

[*She smiles a little*

Hopping away,
no, he's not a sparrow,
he's more like a
poor angry boy—and so soon!

[*She lets the beans slip through her fingers.*

Lima beans, string beans,
kidney beans, white or black—
you're all alike—
though not all alike to him.

[*She perks her head.*

It's alike to me
what's alike to him—

[*She looks out of the window.*

though I'm sorry for you,
crooked strings, straight strings,
and so glad for you,
creamy ones, succulent—
what did he say of you?

[*She returns to splitting the limas; with crescendo animation.*

Heighho, it's all one to me,
so he loves what I do,
I'll do what he loves.

Angry boy? No, a man
quite young in the practice
of wedlock—and love!
Come, limas, to work now—
we'll serve him, heart, appetite,
whims, crosspatches and all—
though we boil for it later!
The dinner bell calls us,
ding, dong, ding, dell!

[THE HUSBAND opens the door and pokes in his head.
THE WIFE hears him and is silent. He edges into
the room and then stops, humble, contrite, abject.
Almost in a whisper:

Wife!

[She does not heed him. He, louder:

Sweet wife!

[She does not answer. He, still louder:

Beloved,
dear, dearest wife!

[She does not answer. He approaches carefully,
almost with reverence, watches her, takes the other
chair and cautiously sets it down next to hers.

HE

Wife!

SHE

Yes?

HE

Will you—
I want to—
won't you —
may I sit next to you?

SHE

Yes.

HE

I want to—
will you—
won't you
forgive me—I'll
eat all the beans in the world!

[THE WIFE looks up at THE HUSBAND roguishly. He drops down beside her with the evident intention of putting his arm about her, only to jump up as, inadvertently, he has looked into the bowl. He rubs his eyes, sits down slowly, looks again, only to jump up again. The third time he sits down with extreme caution, like a zoölogist who has come upon a new specimen of insect. THE WIFE seems oblivious of his emotion. He rises, looks from one side of her, then the other, warily. At last, rapturously:

HE

Lima beans?

[She looks up tenderly and invitingly, indicating his chair.

SHE

Lima beans

[He sits down beside her. With greater awe and emphasis:

HE

Lima beans?

SHE

Lima beans!

[A moment of elfin silence.

HE

Sweet wife!

SHE

Sweet husband!

HE

Where—

whence—

how did it—

how did it happen?

SHE

I don't know.

HE

You do—

you do know—

SHE

I don't!

HE

Tiny miracle,
you do—
you're a woman,
you're a wife,
you're an imp—
you do know!

SHE

Well—

HE

Well?

SHE

Er—

HE

Eh?

SHE

Somebody—

HE

Yes, yes?

SHE

Somebody—

sent them—

HE

Sent them?

SHE

Brought them!

HE

Brought them?

SHE

Yes!

HE

Who?

SHE

Somebody!

HE

Somebody who?

SHE

I can't tell—

HE

You can.

SHE

I—won’t tell—

HE

You will—

SHE

I won’t—

HE

You will—

SHE

Well!

HE

Well?

SHE

You ought to know!

HE

I ought to?

SHE

You ought to—

HE

But I don’t—

SHE

Yes, you do!

HE

I do not—

SHE

You do!

[THE HUSBAND eyes THE WIFE thoughtfully. She aids him with a gently mischievous smile. He smiles back in understanding.

HE

I know!

SHE

You do not—

HE

Yes, I do!

SHE

Are you sure?

HE

Sure enough—

SHE

Who was it?

HE

I won't tell—

SHE

You will!

[He points at the audience with warning, goes to the keyhole and listens, draws the window-shade and returns. She nods quickly and puts her head closer to his, her wide-open eyes on the audience. He puts his head to hers, his wide-open eyes on the audience, then turns quickly and whispers something in her ear. She nods with secret, uproarious delight.

SHE

Yes!

HE

Yes?

SHE

Yes!

[They embrace and click their heels with unrestrained enthusiasm. THE WIFE holds out the bowl to THE HUSBAND with mock solemnity. He grasps it and

together they raise it above their heads, lower it to their knees, and then shell the beans with one accord. They kiss each other daintily six times. The curtain begins to quiver. As before, but accelerando.

HE

Stop, queer little dear!

Why is a kiss?

SHE

I don't know.

HE

You don't?

SHE

No!

HE

Then why do you do it?

SHE

Love!

HE

Love?

SHE

Yes!

HE

And why is—

[They are interrupted. THE CURTAIN comes capering down! The last we behold of the happy pair is their frantic signalling for THE CURTAIN to wait till they have finished. But curtains cannot see—or understand?]

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